

## **SAUDI ARABIA (TIER )**

Saudi Arabia is a destination for men and women from South and East Asia and East Africa trafficked for the purpose of labor exploitation, and for children from Yemen, Afghanistan, and Africa trafficking for forced begging. Hundreds of thousands of low-skilled workers from India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, and Kenya migrate voluntarily to Saudi Arabia; some fall into conditions of involuntary servitude, suffering from physical and sexual abuse, non-payment or delayed payment of wages, the withholding of travel documents, restrictions on their freedom of movement and non-consensual contract alterations. The Government of Saudi Arabia does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Saudi Arabia has moved from Tier to Tier because of its lack of progress in anti-trafficking efforts, particularly its failure to protect victims and prosecute those guilty of involuntary servitude. Despite reports of trafficking and abuses of domestic and other unskilled workers and children, there is evidence of only one Saudi Government prosecution of a Saudi employer for a trafficking-related offense during the reporting period. Some victims of abuse, due to procedural hurdles, choose to leave the country rather than confront their abusers in court. They are required first to file a complaint with the police before they are allowed access to shelters. The government offers no legal aid to foreign victims and does not otherwise assist them in using the Saudi criminal justice system to bring their exploiters to justice. If a victim chooses to file a complaint, he or she is not allowed to work. The Saudi Government does, however, provide food and shelter for female workers who file complaints or run away from their employers. Criminal cases are adjudicated under Sharia law, and there is no evidence trafficking victims are accorded legal assistance before and during Sharia legal proceedings. The government should consider adopting comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation that would punish traffickers, provide for the protection of victims, and facilitate prevention programs. It should also collect and disseminate data on prosecution and mediation efforts, prosecute aggressively cases of physical and sexual abuse using available criminal laws, and increase its efforts to prevent and investigate the trafficking of children for forced begging.

### ***Prosecution***

There is limited evidence indicating that the government has this year improved its prosecution efforts over last year. Saudi Arabia lacks laws criminalizing most trafficking offenses. Most abuses involving foreign workers are dealt with by Islamic law, royal decrees, and ministerial resolutions; few are submitted to criminal prosecution. Domestic workers, which comprise a significant portion of the foreign workforce, are excluded from protection under Saudi labor laws. Most cases involving trafficking or abuse of foreign workers are settled out of court through mediation. In , there were reports of Philippine female domestic workers raped; however, there were no reports of prosecutions. In , the Ministry of Labor issued resolutions, among other things, prohibiting trading in work visas, employing and exploiting children, and recruiting for begging. It investigated some cases of abusive employers and instituted a tracking system. To date, abusive employers have been barred from hiring workers. The government provides training for police officers to recognize and handle cases of foreign worker abuse.

### ***Protection***

The Saudi Government has not improved its efforts to protect victims of trafficking but continues to operate three shelters for abused female expatriate workers in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. It also operates facilities for abandoned children, including trafficking victims, in Jeddah, Mecca, and Medina. However, the government does not provide shelter to adult male workers. There are no NGOs working with trafficking victims. The government mediates disputes and alleged abuses of foreign workers — including complaints of a criminal nature — and seeks to return victims to their home countries without adequately investigating and prosecuting crimes committed against them.

### ***Prevention***

Saudi Arabia's limited efforts to prevent trafficking include: distributing information at embassies abroad, licensing and regulating the activities of recruitment agencies, monitoring immigration patterns and visa issuance, and promoting awareness through the media and religious authorities. The government has begun working with UNICEF and the Yemeni Government to prevent trafficking of children for begging. A plan envisioned several years ago to distribute

information to foreign workers at Saudi Arabian airports upon arrival has not been implemented. Religious leaders have preached in mosques sermons about the evil of abusing employees.